

MALPRACTICE

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EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

A MAN in hospital scrubs runs through the darkness favoring his side. Branches snag at his face and clothing as he stumbles through the brush.

EXT. FOREST, ELSEWHERE - NIGHT

Flashlight beams cut through the fog. A pair of dogs sniff the ground. They catch a scent, bark, then pull their leashes taut. The three HOODED FIGURES holding them follow at a run.

EXT. STREAM - NIGHT

Bare feet splash through shallow water. The MAN IN SCRUBS reaches the opposite bank and collapses from exhaustion.

He hears dogs bark in the distance, struggles to his feet, and continues running.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

The MAN IN SCRUBS stops and rests against a tree. Flashing blue and red lights illuminate the forest's edge ahead. Gathering his strength, he staggers toward them.

EXT. STREAM - NIGHT

Heavy boots and dogs run through the water. The dogs pause on the bank, sniffing. They catch the scent, and the pursuit continues.

EXT. FOREST'S EDGE - NIGHT

The MAN IN SCRUBS crouches at the tree line. A wide grassy field stretches before him. Beyond it lies a country road. A patrol car is parked there, its lights flashing. A SHERIFF'S DEPUTY stands at a second vehicle, his back to the MAN.

Gripping his side and wincing, the MAN IN SCRUBS runs toward the deputy.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

Hank Williams serenades from the DRIVER'S radio as the deputy writes him a ticket.

EXT. FOREST'S EDGE - NIGHT

Upon seeing the patrol car, the hooded figures silence the dogs. In the dim light, their full garb is visible: long red cloaks made of rough material. One of them runs alone after the MAN IN SCRUBS.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

The Deputy tears off the ticket and hands it to the Driver.

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

The MAN IN SCRUBS stumbles, looks over his shoulder, sees his pursuer, gets up, and keeps running.

The Hooded Figure gains with every step.

EXT. ENBANKMENT - NIGHT

The MAN scrambles up toward the road. A hand grabs his ankle. With his free foot, and every ounce of remaining strength, he kicks at the hood. The Hooded Figure falls, and the MAN IN SCRUBS continues upward.

INT. TRUCK - NIGHT

A TRUCKER steers his rig down the country road. Ahead is the patrol car.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

The Deputy sees the MAN IN SCRUBS as he stumbles onto the roadside. Bloodied. Breathing heavily. A ghost. The deputy's hand whips to his holster. What the?

MAN IN SCRUBS
(barely audible)
Help me.

He staggers into the street. Headlights blind him.

INT. TRUCK - NIGHT

The trucker brakes. Too late.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

Tires squeal. Brakes smoke. Finally the rig comes to a stop.

The Trucker gets out, spooked. He and the Deputy rush to the limp and broken body lying motionless on the asphalt. The Trucker reaches to touch him, but the Deputy stays his hand.

DEPUTY
(into radio)
915 to county. Request ambulance at-

He sees movement in the field and shines his flashlight.

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

The Hooded Man runs toward the forest.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

DEPUTY
Hey! Stop!

He doesn't.

INT. AMBULANCE - NIGHT

The MAN IN SCRUBS lies unconscious on a gurney. It rattles as the ambulance bounces down the highway, sirens wailing.

The EMT attending him wears rubber gloves and a surgical mask. He notices a circle of blood on the MAN's shirt. With great care he lifts it to reveal a large bloody bandage. As he pulls the bandage away, The MAN's eyes shoot open.

With consciousness comes pain. Every muscle in the MAN's body constricts in agony. Panicked, he claws at the EMT, pulling away his mask.

And coughs.

Saliva hits the EMT's face. The MAN continues coughing, almost uncontrollably as if he were choking. Suddenly he stops.

His back arches in a final burst of pain then falls limp onto the gurney. Dead.

Normally the EMT would care. But right now he's got his own problems. Like the burning sensation on his face. He wipes at it, but the flesh is already bubbling.

The real pain, however, comes from his eyes. He cries out and rubs them frantically.

The DRIVER sees him struggling in the rear-view mirror.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

The ambulance pulls over. The Driver runs to the back and throws open the door. The EMT collapses into his arms, coughing in his face.

The Driver lowers him to the ground and stares in horror. Splotches of skin on the EMT's face are melting away.

The Driver cries out and stumbles backwards, partly out of fear but mostly out of pain. Because now his own face is burning. He rubs it frantically, but the mutation spreads faster than he can control.

GRAVEL ROADSIDE

All is quiet. The Driver drops into frame, landing on his back and staring absently skyward. He's hardly recognizable, though. What with his skin so inflamed and his eyes so sunken. He looks like a badly burned eighty-year-old version of himself.

He couldn't be more dead.

EXT. SKY - NIGHT

Millions of tiny white lights shine atop a black, cloudless canvas.

We pan down to reveal the same sky hovering over-

EXT. BUILDING - NIGHT

An old brick apartment building in a seedy part of town. Two black unmarked vans sit parked at the curb.

A DOOR

As it's kicked in. A team of armed BIOHAZARD AGENTS storm into--

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

It's more of a laboratory than a living space, filled with diagnostic machines, test tubes, syringes, computer terminals. A long blue cloak hangs by a table.

The agents sweep the room and closets, their sleek gas masks covering their faces. Finally they holster their weapons.

AGENT
Empty, sir.

FRANK
All right. Let's bag it.

The agents begin bagging equipment as FRANK HAUGEN steps to the table and examines the cloak. He sees a worn book of scripture and picks it up.

CARTER (O.S.)
Some light reading, Frank?

CARTER, a younger agent, takes the book and reads a marked passages.

CARTER
"And a prophet will he raise up
among them...and the unworthy will
he burn as stubble."

He raises an eyebrow and looks at Frank.

CARTER
Stubble?

FRANK
As in "to a crisp."

CARTER
Hm. Appetizing.

AGENT
(to Frank)
Sir?

The agent sits at a computer monitor.

AGENT

I think you better see this.

Frank and Carter go to the monitor. On screen is a headshot of a young black girl. Her name, KIMBERLY STANTON, and her entire medical history appear below the flashing words "sickle cell anemia."

FRANK

We got an address?

AGENT

Thirty-seven Bueacrest Ave.

THE NUMBER 37

On a door, seen through a pair of night-vision binoculars. The image rises to the second floor window, where the light is on and two silhouettes are visible.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

FRANK

(looking through binoculars)
Plastic over the windows. Second floor.

CARTER

(smiling)
Maybe they're painting.

Frank rolls his eyes.

FRANK

(to the lieutenant)
I want a perimeter.

The LIEUTENANT signals and in moments armed agents wearing full containment gear surround the townhouse.

EXT. TOWNHOUSE - NIGHT

Frank and Carter are at the door.

CARTER

We knocking doors or knocking heads?

Frank snap cocks his pistol.

CARTER
Good. I hate diplomacy.

Frank flips on the camera attached to the side of his mask.
Carter does the same.

FRANK
(into headset)
Peeps, cameras are rolling. You
read?

INT. VAN - NIGHT

PEEPS, a man with a bucket of Chinese food, sits at a wall of monitors. Frank's and Carter's POV are broadcast on two of them.

PEEPS
(singing)
Bad boys bad boys, what ya gonna
do?

EXT. TOWNHOUSE - NIGHT

FRANK
I'll take that as a yes.

He inserts a tiny instrument into the keyhole.

INT. GIRL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sheets of plastic are taped over the windows and the sliding glass door.

STANTON
It's going to be all right,
sweetheart.

ROLAND STANTON kneels beside his daughter Kimberly. She's sits in a tiny chair, wearing a medical mask and holding a teddy bear.

A young, broad-shouldered DOCTOR pulls a syringe from his briefcase.

INT. TOWNHOUSE, PARLOR

The front door opens without a squeak. Frank and Carter step inside, guns at the ready and stealthily climb the staircase.

INT. BEDROOM

The Doctor wipes Kimberly's upper arm with a cotton swab.

INT. HALLWAY

Frank and Carter creep toward the closed bedroom door.

INT. BEDROOM

The Doctor lowers the needle just as Frank and Carter storm in, guns thrust forward.

FRANK

Freeze!

(to the Doctor)

You, put it down!

He doesn't. The tip of the needle is already touching skin, not yet breaking it.

FRANK

Do it! Now!

STANTON

(to Frank)

What is this? Who are you?

Frank's eyes are distracted long enough for the Doctor to make his move. He slings the briefcase across the room and into Frank. It hits the gun away and knocks him backward.

Carter steadies his aim, but the Doctor is faster. He shoves him in the chest with the force of a cannonball. Carter flies into the opposite wall, cracking the sheetrock and splintering some shelves.

Stanton stares wide-eyed and frozen as the Doctor lifts him, growls in his face, and tosses him aside as if he weighed nothing. Stanton smashes through the closet door and falls unconscious to the floor.

BOOMBOOM. Two bullets rip into the Doctor's side. He falls to his knees. Frank rises, still holding his aim. The Doctor grabs Kimberly and makes her a human shield.

Frank holds a bead and cautiously steps forward. The Doctor sees the syringe beside him and picks it up.

FRANK

No!

The Doctor sticks it into Kimberly, who cries out in pain and fright. He then pushes her into Frank's arms and jumps through the sliding door. Glass explodes outward as he tumbles with the tarp onto the balcony.

BOOMBOOM. Frank puts two rounds into the Doctor's back, sending him over the side and out of sight.

Carter, bruised but breathing, gets to his feet.

FRANK

Go! Go!

Carter rushes to the balcony.

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

The Doctor is on his feet, surrounded by agents.

He grabs one, spins him sideways and throws him into two others. They tumble in a heap.

Another agent gets off a shot, again into the Doctor's side. Rather than go down, however, he grabs the gun and points it at the others. They dive for cover as he sprays their surroundings with bullet.

He spins around and points the gun at the balcony. His eyes meet Carter's. Rather than shoot, he drops the weapon and sprints up the alley.

INT. VAN - NIGHT

Peeps watches the monitors.

PEEPS

He's running.

EXT. BALCONY - NIGHT

Carter aims, but can't get a clear shot. He drops over the side and tears after him.

INT. BEDROOM

Frank quickly puts the syringe into a small air-tight container.

FRANK
(into headset)
I need a bag in here.

EXT. TOWNHOUSE - NIGHT

HERNANDEZ, a female agent, grabs a containment kit from the van and hustles toward the front door.

INT. BEDROOM

Frank kneels beside Kimberly.

FRANK
I'm not gonna hurt you. Kimberly,
right?

She nods as Hernandez bursts in.

HERNANDEZ
I got her. Go.

Frank runs and drops over the balcony.

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

A few agents are getting to their feet. Frank looks around him. No sign of the Doctor.

FRANK
(into headset)
Peeps?

PEEPS (V.O.)
They're heading north.

FRANK
Which way is north?

PEEPS
Left. Left.

Frank pulls the gas mask away and sprints to his left. Several agents follow.